



U.S. Agency for
International
Development

Bureau for
Global Health

COUNTRY PROFILE

HIV/AIDS

PHILIPPINES

Since the first case of AIDS in the Philippines was reported in 1984, the epidemic has progressed slowly, and continues to be classified as “low level.” The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that by the end of 2001, 9,400 people were living with HIV/AIDS in the Philippines, yielding an adult infection rate of less than 0.1 percent. HIV infection is

present in all regions of the country, though it appears to be concentrated around large urban areas.

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2001)	9,400
Total Population (2001)	77,131,000
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2001)	0.02%
HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population most at risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients seeking care for a sexually transmitted infection, or others with known risk factors)	0.1%
Population not at risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	—

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

As of October 2002, 1,776 HIV/AIDS cases had been reported to the Philippine Department of Health. Heterosexual transmission accounted for almost two-thirds of all cases (1,108), followed by sex between men (311), and bisexual contact (89). Perinatal transmission was attributed in only 27 cases, 13 cases were transmitted via blood, and six were transmitted through injecting drug use. Officials estimate that only about 5 percent of cases are reported and that actual levels of HIV infection and AIDS deaths are likely much higher.



Map of Philippines: PCL Map Collection,
University of Texas

Even among at-risk populations, infection rates in the Philippines are extremely low. Annual surveys of at-risk populations (including male and female commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users) indicate HIV prevalence rates of less than 1 percent. While the Philippines has been successful to date in keeping the AIDS epidemic at bay, an active sex industry and a population of injecting drug users pose an ongoing threat for future spread of the disease. Behavioral data from 1997–2001 indicate knowledge of AIDS and prevention practices are increasing, yet high levels of risk behavior continue.

Several underlying dynamics have worked to keep HIV prevalence in the Philippines relatively low. According to the United Nations Development Program, such factors include:

- Circumcision, which reduces transmission risk;
- Geography (no land borders, many islands);
- Relatively low numbers of foreign tourists;
- A culture of sexual conservatism (most Philipinos are practicing Catholics or Muslims);
- Relatively low levels of injecting drug use (drugs are a problem but intravenous use is low);

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- National, multisector HIV/AIDS policies; and
- Effective information, education, and communication campaigns.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Government of the Philippines has acted aggressively to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS throughout the country. The government established a National AIDS Prevention and Control Program in 1987, and in 1995, the Philippine National AIDS Council—the central advisory, planning, and policy body for all HIV/AIDS prevention and control activities in the country—developed a National HIV/AIDS Strategy. The National Program’s main priorities as presented in the Philippine National AIDS Council 1999–2004 Strategic Plan are:

- Information, education, and communication: Reducing risky behavior to under 25 percent in vulnerable populations and in the general population;
- Research, surveillance, and monitoring: Establish a functional database system integrating all sexually transmitted infection and HIV/AIDS information by 2004;
- Care and support: Provide basic health services and community-based support systems to persons with HIV/AIDS; and
- Philippine National AIDS Council structure: Expand budget staff allocation for successful implementation of the National Program.

One of the government’s most significant accomplishments is the enactment of the Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998, a model for HIV/AIDS-related human rights legislation. The legislation and the participatory process used for its formulation have been highlighted by UNAIDS as a “best practice.” Key aspects of this legislation include:

- Prohibition of compulsory testing for HIV;
- Respect for human rights, including privacy of individuals living with HIV/AIDS;
- Integration of HIV/AIDS education in schools from intermediate to tertiary levels;
- Provision of basic health and social services for individuals with HIV;
- Promotion of safety and precautions in practices that carry the risk of HIV transmission; and
- Prohibition of discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS in the workplace, schools, hospitals, and in insurance services.

In addition, a broad variety of government departments have integrated HIV/AIDS education and services into their activities, including: Education Culture and Sports; Health; Interior and Local Government; Labor and Employment; Tourism; Social Welfare and Development; Foreign Affairs, National Economic Development; and the Department of Justice.

USAID SUPPORT

In FY 2002 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated \$1.5 million to HIV/AIDS activities in the Philippines. A key objective of USAID’s program in the Philippines is to keep HIV prevalence below 3 percent in populations that frequently engage in risky behavior.

USAID is working with governmental and nongovernmental organizations to:

- Monitor HIV transmission and track risk behaviors among target population groups;
- Develop and implement effective communication and behavior change programs to maintain low rates of infection; and
- Establish model sites for management and care of individuals with sexually transmitted infections.

With USAID support, the Government of the Philippines and several nongovernmental organizations are developing a set of interventions at selected sites. USAID also supports analysis, dissemination, and implementation of advocacy efforts to promote prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

USAID's most significant contribution is the multiyear (1992–2002) AIDS Surveillance and Education Project. Through the AIDS Surveillance and Education Project, USAID channels support to the national AIDS program for surveillance, prevention, and education activities. The Project's fundamental objective is to prevent the rapid increase of HIV/AIDS through surveillance and preventive education.

USAID-supported programs include the following:

Advocacy

At the structural level, the AIDS Surveillance and Education Project advocates national policy changes to ensure that HIV/AIDS interventions are implemented and sustained in a positive enabling environment.

Behavior Change Communication

The AIDS Surveillance and Education Project includes an education intervention designed to promote HIV/AIDS prevention among groups at highest risk of HIV/AIDS, especially in its 10 designated project sites. Implemented through local nongovernmental organizations, training activities focus on:

- Project and financial management;
- Behavioral research;
- Media materials development;
- Community outreach and peer education among at-risk populations;
- Sexually transmitted infection prevention and syndromic management;
- Condom distribution; and
- Project reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

Client groups include female and male sex workers, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, and sexually exploited children.

Capacity Building

Ongoing USAID assistance is geared toward strengthening the capability of local governments to fund and manage activities to maintain the low prevalence of HIV/AIDS in their communities.

USAID also supports activities to build the capacity of nongovernmental organizations. Efforts are made to enhance nongovernmental organization skills in behavioral knowledge and best practices. The Mission works through the Philippine HIV/AIDS Nongovernmental Organization Support Program to increase the role of the nongovernmental organizations in policy and advocacy, and to involve youth and other community members in activities to help them reduce their vulnerability to HIV.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Through the AIDS Surveillance and Education Project, USAID assists the national AIDS program with its surveillance activities and supports the establishment of a national surveillance system for sexually transmitted infections. Other activities have included conducting and disseminating findings of a population-based survey of male sexual behavior and AIDS.

Prevention

To address the gaps in its AIDS Surveillance and Education Project, USAID strives to understand the cultural context of sexually transmitted infection to refine and accelerate existing prevention programs.

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For more information, see www.usaid.gov/pop/aids or www.synergyaids.com.

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